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TRANSMITTING THE SAGE'S "HEART" (II): INSTRUCTING ABSOLUTE PRACTICE—THE PERFECTION OF THE PERFECT TEACHING IN MOU ZONGSAN'S RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CONFUCIAN *DAOTONG*



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Mou Zongsan (1909–1995), one of the main representatives of New Confucianism in twentieth-century China, has presented, under the designation of a moral metaphysics, an ambitious philosophical reconstruction of Confucianism drawing both on Kantian critique and Buddhist scholasticism. I have argued elsewhere that this “philosophized” Confucianism can be understood as a reformulation of the *daotong*, the traditional view that the correct transmission of the Confucian Way proceeds from a master to his disciples. Unlike what Mou’s prominent academic standing, at least in his later years, might suggest, the core of Confucianism in his view is thus transmitted not in public discourse but in an intimate communication between a teacher and his students. Systematically, the reason requiring this restoration of the authority of the Confucian teacher is that in Mou’s view the centerpiece of Confucianism is the personal experience and cultivation of moral feeling. He is convinced that this latter discloses to us a moral compass with the potential to guide us on the right path of action in any given situation. In his hybrid language, Mou uses the Kantian term “intellectual intuition” to accentuate his view that what we gain access to through moral feeling is noumenal rather than sensual, that it belongs to the eternal realm of reason rather than to the ephemeral confines of sensation. Precisely because this intellectual intuition allegedly is not susceptible to linguistic representation and discursive explanation, it has to invoke the authority of the teacher warranting its validity.

Evading linguistic representation, however, is not at all tantamount to escaping linguistic expression. Mou elevates the rhetoric of the “perfect teaching” (*yuanjiao* 圓教) to the specific linguistic form of his philosophy. The figure of a perfect teaching is borrowed from Tiantai Buddhist scholasticism. Just like the concept of an intellectual intuition, it is thus imported into Confucianism from outside. In what follows, I argue that the decisive reason for Mou to dress his philosophy in the guise of a perfect teaching is its “non-contending” character (*bu zheng* 不靜).¹ This specificity of the perfect teaching rests on two pillars: a peculiar mode of linguistic expression and the conviction that the dynamics of its language raises us to a “higher level of truth.”² The linguistic design of a perfect teaching allegedly leaves behind argumentative discourse with its never-ending seesaw of pros and cons. It is therefore the very *form* of its “non-contending” language that renders the perfect teaching perfect: where

there is no actual claim, Mou suggests, there can be no proper refutation. The perfect teaching thus surrounds the inscrutable content of moral metaphysics concealed in the intimate and externally impenetrable experience of intellectual intuition with a rhetorical bulwark repelling any attempt at external criticism by its very design. Yet, Mou's philosophy, thus triumphing over any objection, by the same token also deprives itself of the means to speak in its own favor and further underscores its reliance on the authority of its enunciator. At the same time, understanding Mou's interpretation of the perfect teaching is crucial for grasping two main characteristics of his philosophy.

First, tracing Mou's conception of the perfect teaching and its relation to the *summum bonum*, we can grasp the very mechanism that disconnects the meaning of a teaching from its particular linguistic shape. We can comprehend Mou's tendency, surprising for a thinker who sharpened his conceptual tools with the whetstone of Kant's critical philosophy, to conflate, at the very core of his philosophy, what appears to us the most divergent and incompatible expressions from vastly different intellectual traditions. That Mou thinks himself justified to recognize in Kant's free will just another name for what Confucians refer to as *liangzhi* 良知 (the unconditioned "genuine knowledge [of the Good]") or what Buddhists designate as *lijing* 理境 (something like the unconditioned "sphere of Buddha's reality") is an immediate consequence of this framework: whether we capture the ultimate meaning to which the perfect teaching is directed by the name of "free will," "*liangzhi*," "*lijing*," "*ti*" 體, "substance," "ultimate reality," or by any other term, our choice will not affect what it *is*. The common meaning of all these terms is what they designate—the reality of the Good—and this remains unaffected by its varying titles.

Second, understanding the perfect teaching, moreover, enables us to appreciate its crucial function for establishing what Mou understands as the primacy of practical over theoretical reason: perfect doctrines according to Mou are specifically construed in a way leading the individual to experiencing the reality of the Good in his or her moral practice. Hence it is inherently connected to the idea of a positive notion of intellectual intuition according to which it is *in actu* that morality gains its existential and creative dimension, as through our moral acts we can *really* change our world for the better. Making accessible to us a genuine experience of the *actuality* or *facticity* of morality, the perfect teaching also considerably lightens our burden theoretically to found it. The reality of morality is essentially independent from our representations of it, and what eventually validates our theories about morality is that they guide us on the right Way of moral *practice*.

Yet, even if we understand why Mou thinks that the framework of a perfect teaching can emend the deficiencies of Kant's moral theology and of his notion of the *summum bonum*, his specific attempt to translate Kantianism into the form of a perfect teaching, his so-called two-tiered ontology, at least on Kantian terms patently fails.

After this rather disconcerting conclusion, I shall propose, in the second part of this essay, a more charitable reading of Mou: I argue that there is a close resemblance of Mou's attempt to rescue traditional Confucian views of an intuitive access to truth

to the project of those German idealists who tried to reconcile the truth of reason with the inherited truth of revelation.

We shall, moreover, see that there is a certain tension in what Mou says. If he is right, what the Confucian teacher transmits is a universally accessible truth—even if it is intuitive in nature, it is an insight into what is morally good. In Hegelian terms, Confucianism with Mou thus has become subjective rather than merely positive. Taken to the letter, Mou's restoration of the authority of the teacher therefore eventually seems to be built on sand: if he is unwilling to qualify and thus trim the subjective character of moral intuition, he has to forsake the authority of tradition. If he really endorses the consequences of his "subjectivization" of the Confucian tradition, Mou has to acknowledge that moral intuition is a common good of all people rather than the privilege of a small group of educated Confucians.

I shall eventually conclude with a short and very preliminary sketch adumbrating how Mou's thought, once stripped of its grandiose metaphysical rhetoric, might fruitfully be related to the problem of human freedom in the tension between rationalism and naturalism.

Philosophy as a Kowtow to Confucius

I start my discussion with a short look at the conclusion of Mou's last major work, *The Perfect Good*, which highlights the crucial role of the perfect teaching for his thought. Mou writes here the following verses:

In China, just as in the West, there were wise men, and there were sages,
Their ultimate resort men find in founding
Varied spelling out of the perfect teaching.
And in this endeavor, Confucius was to reach the truth.³

Mou in a final eulogy eventually continues:

The Confucian Sage tacitly harbored Heaven's constant norm within himself,
Mencius broke the dark, disclosed the light of sun and moon, illuminating a new dawn.

...

A light, though, obfuscated by both Master Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi.
A light which Lu Xiangshan in reading Mencius attained within himself,
A light whose norm was newly gauged and truly mastered by Wang Yangming,
A norm perfectly contained in the Four Affirmations and Four Negations of its Goodness,
A norm whose perfect teaching was only raised by Wang Ji.
As a single-rooted unified body and embodiment, it is true perfection,

...

As virtue and happiness indistinctly unify in this perfect actual fact,
Why toil oneself to claim a God for effectuating [this reconciliation] in our stead?
I now and here proclaim and reclaim the Perfect Good,
In a kowtow to the model left behind by Confucius.⁴

Given its prominent position at the end of Mou's last major publication, in many respects a *summa* of his lifework, this poetic resumé of the book's last chapter, on the

“perfect teaching” of Confucianism, also appears like a condensed formula of his entire philosophical heritage. Essentially, Mou’s hymn is an emphatic *confession* to Confucius. And although the word itself finds no mention, when Mou delineates the transmission and growing awareness of that inner constant norm that allegedly led Confucius on his Way of moral cultivation, which was explicated by Mencius and eventually elevated to the level of a “perfect teaching” by Wang Ji 王畿 (Longxi 龍溪) (1498–1583), he offers his version of the Confucian *daotong*. Attributing to Confucius the attainment of the apogee of wisdom as that which introduces the “perfect teaching,” Mou conceals that he borrows the very notion of a “perfect teaching” from a Buddhist context.⁵ Mou’s poem, mentioning the “West” at its very beginning, relocates the continuity of the Way in a context of global competition.

Largely coinciding with Westernization, modernization in twentieth-century China is perceived as a challenge to the continuation of Chinese culture.⁶ Intimately related to the model of self-cultivation allegedly harkening back to Confucius, Chinese culture for Mou essentially rests on a deeply ingrained sense of morality. After all, it was his inner moral compass that invested the historical Confucius with the authority to become the paragon of a specifically Chinese paradigm of moral cultivation.⁷ His own contribution to the *daotong* Mou situates in the context of the confrontation of Confucian moral cultivation with the West. When he claims the “Perfect Good” (*yuanshan* 圓善), Kant’s *summum bonum*, Mou does nothing less than to proclaim the universal significance of the Way, as, in his view, the philosophical deficiencies of Kant are manifest exactly in his inability to conceive a viable concept of the *summum bonum*. This purported insufficiency marks the point where Mou sees himself justified to claim the ability, by virtue of standing in the line of transmission of the Confucian Way, to lead to completion what the German philosopher was incapable of achieving, namely really to rank morality higher than empirical knowledge and to endorse an emphatic notion of the priority of practical over theoretical or speculative reason. To be sure, the name of Kant here is an epitome of Western philosophy as a whole, and Mou leaves no doubt that it was the limitations of his Western background that impeded Kant. The purported shortcomings of the externally dominant West thus most strikingly surface in the limitations of its most advanced philosophy, Kantianism.⁸ As I have shown elsewhere, the crucial step in Mou’s appropriation of Kantian moral philosophy lies in his identification of Kant’s notion of autonomy with the Mencian “heart” (*xin* 心).

Consequently, his short poem stages as the key persons of the correct line of transmission of the Way the main representatives of the *xinxue* 心學, “learning of the heart,” and he takes the opportunity to accuse the obfuscation, by their opponents of the “orthodox” Cheng-Zhu school, of the moral autonomy allegedly enshrined in the Mencian heart. As is widely known, Mou’s integration of Kantian autonomy into the framework of Confucianism hinges on his adoption of a positive notion of “intellectual intuition,” imagined to reveal, in moral feeling, the norm that leads the Confucian sage and that realizes or embodies itself in moral action. Moral action is here conceived as the experience *in actu* of the empirical subject’s dislimitation and the alleged realization of man’s essence as an infinite or unlimited being.⁹ It is precisely

to this ecstatic practice of morality that the “perfect actual fact” of Mou’s poem refers. As in this “perfect actual fact” morality and happiness allegedly coalesce, it renders obsolete Kant’s notion of the *summum bonum*, which can only relegate us to a mere hope—though justified rationally—that there is a God who eventually bridges the radically separate spheres of sensual happiness and intellectual morality. The linguistic resemblance of the Chinese equivalents for “Perfect Good” (*yuanshan* 圓善) and “perfect teaching” (*yuanjiao* 圓教) thus reflects their intimate relation in the context of Mou’s moral philosophy: the perfect teaching provides Mou with a language for speaking about the Perfect Good. Ultimately treating language as a means of instruction rather than representation, a perfect teaching is imagined to clear the way to our personal experience of the actual reality of an unconditioned Good.

Mou on the Perfect Teaching in Tiantai Buddhism

If we want to understand the systematic implications of Mou’s decision to choose the form of the perfect teaching as the adequate linguistic expression for his own philosophy, we first have to see how according to Mou it is used its original context, the scholastic literature of the Buddhist Tiantai school. He has dedicated half of his two-volume work on Chinese Buddhism, *Buddhatva and Prajñā* (1977), to this denomination.¹⁰ Although basically a collection of exegetical notes and terminological clarifications on various Buddhist texts, Mou makes it clear in his introduction that he composes this book as a historian of Chinese philosophy rather than as a Buddhistologist. Accordingly, he claims impartiality for his view that the perfect teaching of Tiantai represents the intellectual culmination of Buddhist scholastics in China.¹¹ The purpose of the perfect teaching is doxographical: it is designed for integrating the immense multiplicity of the Buddha’s teachings and their interpretations into a single comprehensive, and hence perfected, framework.

The Method and Form of the Perfect Teaching

Mou recognizes in the perfect teaching a formidable linguistic tool to provide the required figure of this all-inclusiveness: in their expositions, instead of claiming definite doctrinal contents (*jiaoyi* 教義), Tiantai exegetes are said to concentrate on the ultimate concern of their teaching: the Buddha’s universal realization of liberation.¹² Unlike other doctrinal traditions such “genuine explanations” (*zhengshuo* 正說)¹³ establish linguistic distinctions exclusively as a means for pointing toward this reality beyond language.¹⁴ Sentences here are not viewed as asserting definite propositions. Thus “sterilized” (*si* 死) as bearers of independent meaning or propositional truth, they are considered mere “expedients” (*quan* 權) of the Buddha’s salvific work. As testimonies of this soteriological practice, his various teachings are recognized as ultimately identical in commonly pointing toward one and the same reality: the inconceivable realm of the reality of the Buddha’s universal liberation (*li* 理, *jing* 境, or *li jing* 理境). This reality, hence, is the single meaning common to all of his teachings.¹⁵ In spite of their fundamental difference, the teachings belong to the relative realm of conditioned arising and the reality of the Buddha to the absolute realm of

liberation; the teachings, *insofar as they are efficacious means of liberation*, also partake in the reality of liberation and in this respect prove identical to it (*quan jishi shi* 權即是實).¹⁶ According to Mou, Tiantai exegesis thus reveals a paradoxical “identity” of expedients and reality.¹⁷ The real meaning (*yili zhi shi* 義理之實) of a perfect teaching consequently does not belong to the sphere of semantics; it *is* the reality of liberation.¹⁸

This reality, according to Mou, can also be grasped in very concrete terms: “[becoming a] Buddha necessarily coincides with each and every single action of the ordinary and deluded person, of the [followers] of the two vehicles, and of the bodhisattvas. . . . It is precisely here [i.e., in action] that the Buddha coincides with all sentient beings.”¹⁹ When acting out of compassion, even the unawakened partake in the reality of his salvific practice. It is here, *in practice*, that the absolute proves ultimately identical to the relative.

In Mou’s view, this coincidence of the absolute realm of liberation with the relative realm of individual practice sets Tiantai apart from other Buddhist denominations. Unlike them, the perfect teaching of this tradition in Mou’s view has an *ontological bearing* “showing up in a process of practice discarding [the harmful effects of the illusory] without discarding [the illusory itself].”²⁰ For Mou, this perspective abstains from simply rejecting the ordinary world of deluded sentient beings as a mere illusion that should ultimately be overcome. The Buddha does not abide in a realm free of falseness and illusion. His world is ours, but unlike ignorant beings like us, who suffer from illusion and falseness, he sees through the mechanisms behind and turns them into means of salvation.

Note that what we encounter here is reminiscent of Mou’s vision of Confucianism: the Buddhist practitioner in his compassionate act immediately experiences the *efficiency of an absolute reality*. Just as the empirical subject in Mou’s moral metaphysics is said to turn into an agent of morality, both limited by remaining the concrete person he was before and unlimited by coalescing with the unlimited moral heart itself, the undetached and ignorant sentient being in the moment of engaging in an act of compassion is imagined to partake in the reality of the Buddha’s universal liberation.

The Linguistic Form of the Perfect Teaching

As we have mentioned above, the specificity of the language of the perfect teaching is in its non-contending character, which is in turn entwined with the notion of a non-contending wisdom. In the state of non-contending wisdom, one listening to the Buddha’s words does not take the various formulations of his teachings to the letter. The attempt to seek for consistency by discarding incompatibilities or contradictions appears obsolete to him.²¹ All words of the Buddha are recognized as nothing but means of salvation. According to this view, their particular claims in the last resort appear ultimately irrelevant. According to Mou, the exclusively “instrumental” character of the Buddha’s speech renders his words “unnecessary” so that objecting to them appears futile.²² For Mou, necessity is a privilege of the absolute and ultimately all-inclusive reality of the Buddha. For this reason, nothing that can be asserted in

differentiating speech can be necessary. Non-contending wisdom accepts the inconsistencies and contradictions in Buddha's teachings as an effect not of what he claims but to whom he preaches. From this perspective, raising a genuine objection against any of the Buddha's words *ipso facto* implies debasing oneself by getting involved in a less-inclusive and hence deficient mode of linguistic practice. Thus, for Mou, "non-contending wisdom" "is opposed to differentiating speech without belonging to the same level."²³

On the purely linguistic level, "non-contending" wisdom has to be couched in a "non-contending perfect teaching" in "non-differentiating terms."²⁴ There can be only *one* non-contending perfect teaching, as, in contradistinction to less inclusive teachings, its "non-contending character" obliges it to desist from presenting disputable, let alone disprovable explanations.²⁵ The linguistic strategy for overcoming the deficiencies of differentiating speech is the "paradox" (*guijue* 詭譎): whatever is positively asserted is immediately hedged by the opposite contention. However, this negation is not supposed simply to cancel the preceding positive claim. Rather it is aimed at elevating the consciousness of the listener above the mode of thinking in binary opposites. Aware of the soteriological sterility of thinking in alternatives, non-contending perfect teachings discard the search for clarity by binary decisions: a non-contending perfect teaching does not rebuff objections, because such a step would force it back into the deficient realm of apparent alternatives. Rather, by virtue of its all-inclusiveness a non-contending perfect teaching simply defuses objections by absorbing them. The defect of differentiating speech, which Mou supposes the perfect teaching to cure, is thus its very property of being *contestable*: "All differentiating speech is contestable."²⁶ There is a possibility of manifold alternatives all of which cannot be perfect."²⁷

On the Perfect Doctrine of Confucianism

When Mou applies this paradigm of the perfect teaching to Confucianism, he states—in some tension with what he elsewhere says with respect to the Buddha's soteriological practice—that the perfect teaching of Confucianism "differs from Buddhism and Daoism in that it cannot directly be arrived at by means of paradoxical language,"²⁸ but rather "evolves from a moral consciousness [that] anchors it vertically in moral creation."²⁹ This suggests that, for Mou, the specific emphasis on morality so typical for Confucianism is not essential to perfect teachings *per se*. However, there is one key passage in *Buddhatva and Prajñā* where Mou suggests that a *genuine* perfect teaching does indeed require a moral consciousness, even if this may have gone unnoticed by Buddhist exegetes:

The Buddha is [still] a sage according to a one-sided paradigm (*pianzhixing zhi shengren* 偏至型之聖人). When the Tiantai speaks about perfect reality (*yuanshi* 圓實) it does so with respect to this one-sided paradigm of the Buddha. However, *the point where the kind of perfect reality that it speaks about is ultimately realized rather is the case of the Confucian sage. The Buddha still has to develop moral consciousness (daode yishi* 道德意識). Only then is he able completely to achieve perfect reality. (emphasis mine)³⁰

For Mou, the Buddhists, in spite of providing the perfect paradigm of wisdom, seem unable to complement it with the most accurate model of cultivation, namely the “cultivation of the inner sage” (*neisheng gongfu* 內聖功夫).³¹ In the same book Mou writes in the same vein:

We can only say that, when Buddhism, at the end of its sweeping development, has reached its highest peak, namely the perfect teaching of the Tiantai, in the last consequence it still leads to the Confucian sage’s sphere of being a “prisoner of Heaven” (*tian zhi lu min* 天之戮民) [Confucius’ self-designation in *Zhuangzi* 6.6].”³²

Mou thus clearly distinguishes between the “one-sided perfection” (*pianyuan* 偏圓) of the Buddha and the “well-adjusted” or “genuine perfection” (*zhengyuan* 正圓) of the Confucian sage.³³ I think that Mou’s contention that, ultimately, Buddhist and Confucian perfection lead to the *same* sphere can be interpreted in the sense that, strangely enough, Confucianism is the ultimate *realization* of what Buddhist practice is aimed at. For Mou, there is no doubt that its moral character exalts the Confucian Way over Buddhism. Mou, hence, is convinced that Buddhism indeed *does* imply a moral dimension that Buddhist scholasticism, however, fails to recognize or to acknowledge.

As we have seen, Mou credits Wang Ji for providing Confucianism with a perfect teaching when, in his “four negations” of Wang Yangming’s “teaching in four sentences,” he rejects the distinction of “good” versus “bad” for the successive levels of the genuine heart itself (*xin zhi ti* 心之體), the intentions preceding one’s actions (*yi* 意), the awareness of the moral character of these intentions (*liangzhi* 良知), and the actual performance of one’s actions (*ge wu* 格物).³⁴

Given its crucial role for his conception of a specifically Confucian understanding of autonomy, it is hardly surprising that Mou’s discussion here revolves around Wang Ji’s treatment of the notion of the “heart” or “mind” (*xin*). Setting in with a qualification of Wang Ji’s expression of a “heart without a heart” (*wu xin zhi xin* 無心之心), Mou clarifies that the expression *wu* 無 here “only means an absence on the level of the presentational function of the heart, that is, an absence of consciousness. It is no absence on the level of existence (*cunyou shang* 存有上).”³⁵ For Mou, Wang thus distinguishes the genuine heart itself from its manifestation as an awareness of the moral value of our acts. Characterizing the genuine heart as “knowledge without the distinctive characteristics of knowledge” (*wu zhi xiang zhi zhi* 無知相之知), Mou suggests that the genuine heart is real even if it is possible that one is not aware of it. For him, “genuine knowledge of the Good (*liangzhi*) is always spontaneous (*ziran* 自然) and never brought about intentionally (*you yi* 有意).”³⁶

Apparently it is precisely this spontaneity that authenticates its ontological dimension. Mou’s point seems to be that genuine knowledge, due to its non-intentional character, is not prone to the potentially distorting effects of cognitive representation. If it is exclusively in cognition that illusion and error arise, something instantiating itself spontaneously and entirely independently from representational cognition consequently cannot fall victim to either. We thus have to distinguish genuine knowledge as the uncaused cause of moral action from genuine knowledge as

the conscience of the moral value of our actions allegedly springing from that source. The latter is knowledge *of something*, and hence displays what Mou calls the “characteristic of knowledge”—it is relational and relative in character. Contrary to this, the former is pure actual presence devoid of any relative knowledge *of something*. It is characterized as a “clear awareness” (*mingjue* 明覺). With regard to Wang Ji’s controversial claim that genuine knowledge (*liangzhi*) is neither good nor bad, Mou explains that the norm of moral judgment epitomized in genuine knowledge is not susceptible to either of these expressions. The application to it of both predicates rather turns out to be “meaningless.”³⁷

The perfect teaching of Confucianism as presented by Mou purportedly deals with differentiating language in exactly the same way as does Tiantai exegesis: Wang Ji negates the predicates that he had previously asserted affirmatively. His intention obviously is not bluntly to deny his positive claims. The affirmative assertion is not canceled, but only modified by negation. Genuine knowledge is *good*, as it is the source and cause allowing us to recognize and realize what is good. At the same time, it also is *not good*, because, as the absolute standard of good and bad, it is not good in a privative sense, which would imply something bad opposed to it. The effect of this “paradoxation” is the metaphorization of the predicate—the subject escapes the assignment of the predicate, which is only transferred to it in a figurative sense.

It is easy to see that there will be no predicate that does not allow for being treated in an analogous way. We can thus infer that, ultimately, such a mechanism of mutual neutralization of affirmation and negation is infinite, necessarily leaving the subject toward which the predications are directed out of the reach of language. Even if there would be something absolutely good it would not be possible to capture it by the common assertive use of predicative language. Precisely for answering the question how it can be grasped at all, Mou designs a specific kind of perfect teaching.

Inclusive Perfect Teachings: Toward Experiencing the Absolute

When he adopts the paradigm of the perfect teaching for his brand of Confucianism, Mou introduces a *subcategory* of perfect teachings, which he calls “inclusive” (*ying* 盈). They are said to be able to disclose (*langxian* 朗現) an unlimited heart or mind by virtue of *individual practice*.³⁸ In his attempt to delineate the way that allegedly allows one to arrive at such an inclusive teaching, Mou states that “although knowledge of one single path only reveals one meaning (*yi* 義), it is nonetheless an unlimited heart or mind; for that reason, the single meaning that it reveals in spite of the doctrine’s limits *is not limited itself*. As a consequence, one also does not stick to that meaning by excluding others. The reason is that if it would exclude others the heart or mind would no more be unlimited.”³⁹

This ability of revealing meaning without sticking to specific doctrinal formulae is identified by Mou as the “pervasive” or “universal” (*tong* 通) character of inclusive teachings. Obviously, this pervasive character itself is *no teaching*, but simply the “mutual pervasion of individual perfect and inclusive teachings.”⁴⁰ Rendered in terms of Mou’s paradoxical language, one thus has a teaching without the “characteristics

of a teaching' (*jiaoxiang* 教相): *one grasps the meaning and forgets the teaching.*"⁴¹ Mou, who elsewhere defines a teaching as "whatever suffices to instigate human reason and to guide human beings to practice the purification of their human lives to the utmost degree,"⁴² obviously does not consider the Confucian teaching a theoretical or exegetical exposition,⁴³ but rather an instruction for a practice of moral self-perfection. Its "meaning" consequently is disclosed to an individual precisely when it is overwhelmed and compelled to action by his or her moral feeling. For Mou this "feeling," as we have seen, is not part of the sensual human subject but rather indicative of its coalescence with the unlimited moral mind—Mou's genuine heart. Mou understands it as the moral law imposing itself on an individual subject and translating into spontaneous action. As genuine awareness of the moral law is claimed exclusively to occur in the very performance of a moral act, *its meaning is always actual*. This also implies that it eventually evades representation: *the real meaning of the moral norm or law is its being executed*. Isolated from its concrete experience, the moral norm hence remains a void catchword. The single possibility to understand it is to experience it.

What is called the "real truth" in the Tiantai exegesis therefore coincides for Mou with the "moral norm" (*li* 理) of Confucians. Precisely because this meaning is something actual and essentially non-linguistic, Mou suggests that it is not essential to it how it is named. In my view, this is the essence of Mou's statement above on the inclusive teaching: as perfect teachings are designed to lead to practical moral action and thereby to the actual awareness of the moral norm, they are ultimately conducive to the revelation of one and the same meaning. Essentially non-linguistic, this ultimate meaning remains the same although its designation varies according to different perfect teachings.

Absolute Meaning and the Task of Rescuing Kantianism

When, in the preface to his *Phenomenon and the Thing in Itself*, Mou elevates the method of understanding the various teachings, "according to their meaning rather than to their formulations,"⁴⁴ to the status of a leading principle of his philosophical engagement with different Chinese traditions, but also with Kantian moral philosophy, he suggests that in spite of their vastly different backgrounds and concerns there is a way to read these extremely divergent writings with regard to their allegedly ultimate goal: the attainment *in actu* of an awareness of the meaning of the moral norm. Kant's *summum bonum* for him is thus simply yet another name pointing toward this essence of moral practice: in the monograph dedicated to this notion, Mou consequently claims that the solution to the "Western" problem of the "Highest Good" as highlighted by Kant can be found in the moral norm of the perfect teachings of the East.⁴⁵ Mou closes his discussions on the Perfect Good with the statement that "if the perfect teaching is achieved, then the Perfect Good is clarified. . . . Philosophical thought (*sikao* 思考) ends at this point."⁴⁶

Western doctrines, Christianity, and, more specifically, Kant's moral theology in the framework of the perfect teaching are classified as "exclusive teachings" (*lijiao*

離教). For understanding this term, remember that the opposite, “inclusive teachings,” were defined by Mou by their potential to disclose the unlimited heart by individual practice. Yet, according to Mou, awareness of the unlimited or absolute in Christianity remains on the level of linguistic distinctions: it is conceptualized as an ultimately void reification termed God. Conceived as an absolute Other, it is stuck at the level of representation. Because as such it is understood in terms of an absolute difference, the aim of an inclusive perfect doctrine, namely to attain an awareness of an essential or underlying identity of the empirical self with God *in moral practice*, seems out of reach.

As we have just said, even Kant relies on the concept of God as the capstone of his moral philosophy, which thereby transforms into a moral theology. From the perspective of a perfect teaching it consequently falls into the category of an “exclusive” teaching. Completing Kant for Mou therefore requires raising it to an “inclusive” one, and this intention is tantamount to claiming that *it has to provide for the possibility that the absolute can be practically experienced*. Precisely this is what is warranted, in Mou’s philosophy, by the positive notion of intellectual intuition.

In applying to Kant’s moral philosophy the framework of the “inclusive” perfect teaching with its orientation toward a practical experience of absolute reality in moral action, Mou for one thing is forced to treat it in the same way as Christian theology, and we may suspect that it is for this reason that the fundamental difference between both critical philosophy and dogmatic metaphysics and theology might have escaped his attention; for another, much more vexingly, it might have escaped his attention that what is the highest merit of Kant’s philosophy in his view, namely the transcendental foundation of the a priori and universal character of moral autonomy, essentially hinges on preserving the fundamental conceptual distinctions and theoretical premises of critique. Identifying Kant’s philosophical language as a mere expedient for the ultimate realization of moral practice in the framework of a perfect teaching is to forsake the foundation of critique as a whole. Moral autonomy deprived of its specific conceptual design ends up as mere figurative speech. Even if we accept Mou’s claim that in moral action we can become aware of the reality of an unconditioned moral norm, it appears meaningless to interpret this in terms of an actual experience of man’s moral autonomy—at least if one appeals to the respective Kantian concept.⁴⁷

We conclude that the very framework of the perfect teaching itself, if applied to Kantian critique, cannot but distort the latter’s essentials. Yet, what Mou claims is exactly that the paradigm of a perfect teaching enables one to conceive of a Kantian Perfect Good without the need to hope for God as its exclusive, yet merely ideal guarantee. The reason put forward by Mou is that only a perfect teaching can warrant that “practical reason is fully realized,”⁴⁸ a phrase obviously alluding to the kind of realization of the genuine heart in one’s concrete moral act allegedly accessed through intellectual intuition. As Mou sees it, Kant was forced to conceive of morality and religion as two separate spheres, because the Chinese tradition of a perfect teaching was unavailable to him. Consequently, Mou purports, Kant lacked a frame-

work allowing for a rational way to acknowledge a possibility of actually experiencing the absolute. For Kant, the absolute had to stay separated from the moral subject, Mou seems to suggest, because of the “exclusive” character of the Christian doctrine, which is a theology and hence unable to conceive of the absolute as anything else than an “anthropomorphic God.”

Trapped in Paradox: On Critique and Dogmatism

A First Conclusion: Reason and Tradition Unreconciled—The Failure of Moral Metaphysics

Mou’s philosophized Confucianism vests into a Kantian guise the transmission of knowledge and practice of the “genuine heart.” Thus, “orthodox transmission”—as Julia Ching once translates *daotong*—just as in imperial Neo-Confucianism, “emerges finally as the transmission of the ‘sage’s *hsin*’.”⁴⁹ This heart being a purely internal matter, the Confucian sage, though in possession of a higher level of truth, is divested of any means to make it understood to others. Neither his way of knowing nor his mode of speaking are communicable in an ordinary sense of the word. The truth of the sage’s words therefore cannot be warranted by what he says but only by the fact that it is he who says it. Authority is transferred from the enunciation to the enunciator.

So far, our assessment of Mou’s translation of Neo-Confucianism into philosophical terms seems rather sobering. Taking Mou’s discussions of central Kantian concepts to the letter often simply leaves one at a loss. What is more, the peculiar fabric of Mou’s philosophy indeed strongly suggests that it was not least designed for immunizing traditional morality and scholarship against the potentially detrimental impact of modernization.

Outlook: Resolving the Contradiction—Rationalizing Tradition

At the beginning of this essay, I announced that I intended to adumbrate the possibility of a more reconciliatory and charitable perspective on Mou’s moral metaphysics. In this endeavor, I proceed in two steps.

First, I compare Mou’s attempt to rescue the authority of tradition to Hegel’s endeavor to vindicate the revealed truth of Christianity. Not only do both Hegel and Mou side with a transmitted truth whose value is questioned by the universal claim of the truth of reason, but both thinkers also emphasize the role of the subject.

In a second step, I proceed to ask—all by admitting the inextricable incompatibilities resulting from Mou’s intertwining of Kantianism, Confucianism, and Buddhism—if there is a way of making good sense of Mou’s moral metaphysics. I argue that among philosophers, Mou is by no means alone in his liberal use of his predecessors’ concepts and ideas, and that consequently his thought indeed deserves our attempt to make better sense of it. I think that one *can* read Mou as saying something relevant about human freedom, and I suggest that his talk about the unlimited or finite character of human beings can be read in a sense that is not exclusively figurative.

Let me now first turn to post-Kantian German philosophy. In the preface to his early work *Christianity as a Positive Religion*, Hegel writes that his essay intends to “derive that now discarded theology from what we now know as a need of human nature and would thus exhibit its naturalness and inevitability. An attempt to do this presupposes the belief that the convictions of many centuries, regarded as sacrosanct, true, and obligatory by the millions who lived and died by them in those centuries, were not, at least on their subjective side, downright folly or plain immorality. If the whole fabric of dogmatic theology is expounded, by the favorite method of using general concepts, as a relic of the Dark Ages, untenable in an enlightened epoch, we are still humane enough to raise the question: how is it possible to explain the construction of a fabric that is so repugnant to human reason and so erroneous through and through?”⁵⁰ When Hegel sets out to prove that dogmatic theology, which had come to be rejected as incompatible with the truth of reason, is in fact natural and hence inevitable, a central motive for him is his respect and appreciation for the millions who based all their hopes and their efforts on this allegedly altogether irrational and fundamentally absurd foundation. The deep scorn of his age for everything that was holy and valuable to previous centuries is for Hegel indicative of an attitude of outright inhumanity. And what is more, explaining the triumph of dogmatic theology as a mere result of a contamination of the “love of truth” by impure motives and instrumentalization for him “presupposes a deep contempt for man and the presence of a glaring superstition in his intellect.”⁵¹ The wholesale rejection of dogmatic theology in the name of enlightened reason, which, according to Hegel, plainly ignores the eternal to which religion had attached the accidental, eventually is to be blamed, in his view, for its superficiality.⁵²

Hegel aims to disprove the suspicion of the self-declared advocates of reason that the Christian faith because of its origin in Jesus’ words and deeds can be regarded as merely positive and hence eventually accidental in character. By “positive” Hegel designates religion as based on mere authority and handed down as a matter of fact. He opposes to it the “subjective,” which refers to religion as arising from people’s *hearts*.

Hegel’s attempt at detecting the subjective aspects of the Christian faith here strikingly parallels Mou Zongsan’s intention to argue for an interpretation of Confucian tradition that connects authority back to subjectivity. Mou denies the mere positivity or contingency of the Confucian Way. With Hegel he shares a high respect for the tradition in which he stands and the belief that the testimony of the centuries forbids one simply to discard it as outright folly.

Widening our scope on nineteenth-century German philosophy, it seems admissible to argue that German idealism to a considerable degree could be characterized by the aim of reconciling truth of reason and truth of revelation—very obviously so in the work of Schelling. In a way, tradition is here defended against the suspicion of mere accident and hence both inessentiality and irrelevance by reinterpreting it under the guidance of reason. That such a need came to be felt is obviously connected

to the fact that the age of enlightenment in general and Kantian critique in particular have presented ways not only of conceiving morality in exclusively rational and subjective terms, but also of conceiving religion purely in terms of morality. Mou Zong-san, this is to say, shares with German idealists not only the concern for a tradition apparently rendered widely obsolete but also the philosophical point of reference—the imposition of the solid rock of Kantian critique.⁵³ Just like Hegel, who remarks that religion becomes positive only when it contradicts freedom, Mou, too, contrary to the clamor of radical iconoclasts in China's twentieth century, intends to show that it is, after all, the spirit of freedom rather than of slavery that makes up the core of Confucianism.

Subjectivity and the End of Authority

This last point eventually allows us to adumbrate a slight dialectical twist—arguably unintended—in Mou's argument: in my previous discussion I expressed my concerns regarding the complete internalization of Mou's moral metaphysics and the intriguing lack of any external criteria for evaluating its claims. Let us, for now, concentrate on the critical potential that a philosophy may have in engendering a process of emancipation of the individual, rather than on the sort of epistemological critique in the more technical sense we have been concerned with so far. The kind of commitment to ideals of general acceptance and high prestige such as freedom or virtue, emphatically proclaimed in Mou's confession of a substantial Confucian humanness along with the obvious lack of verifiable external criteria, at least in principle opens up space for anyone to claim his or her share in these precious goods. True, the very lack of explicit criteria gives way to arbitrariness if one likes to put it in negative terms. Yet, isn't this what under more favorable circumstances we could just as well call by the notable name of freedom? The teacher whose authority rests exclusively on his internal experience, which remains ineffable and hence inexplicable to anyone else, also has nothing to oppose to someone else who lays claim on the same authority except his belief and his appeal to other generally acknowledged authorities.

By his choice of placing the subjective awareness and realization of the genuine heart at the center of his moral metaphysics, Mou evidently valued these higher than the authority of the Sage. Confucius after all is the Sage only because he perfectly embodies the genuine heart. Stripped of the seal of the genuine heart there simply can be no authority for Confucius. By will or not: what can be suspected as a tool for monopolizing for the Confucian expert on inner morality the privilege of interpreting tradition, and what can be argued to have been coined exactly for this purpose, if taken seriously, at the same time deprives that expert of any means whatsoever for plausibly arguing for his privilege on the basis of reference to anything non-internal. If Mou presents himself as a Confucian authority on the basis of his knowledge and education rather than his wisdom—which is what he doubtless does—he eventually seems to fail on his own standards.

As Zheng Jiadong has noticed, the fact that Mou's attempts at rehabilitating Confucianism hardly leave the narrow confines of academia suggests that he actually

joins in a tradition of scholarship rather than a practice of the Confucian Way.⁵⁴ He doubts that Mou's New Confucianism is able to live up to its own ideal of unifying scholarship and practical teaching.⁵⁵ We might add that even if this would turn out to be possible, scholarship has definitely forfeited the means for canceling the consequences of Mou's philosophization of tradition: if Mou indeed succeeds in proving that Confucianism in its essence is subjective rather than positive, this irrevocably implies the priority of what he came to designate by the Kantian name of moral autonomy over any merely accidental fact about historical Confucianism. If Confucianism has really become subjective, if its core is warranted by reason—as Mou claims—and if, therefore, it has become necessary or inevitable rather than a mere accident of history, this also means that its immanent validity exclusively rests on its rational nature—be it accessed via conceptual thought or intellectual intuition.

The Irreducibility of Freedom: Making Sense of Mou's Two-Tiered Ontology

In the final part of this essay I eventually want to come back to Mou's philosophy proper. Much of the criticism of Mou's reference to Kant's thought—my own included—tries to make sense of his writings by taking to the letter the Kantian concepts to which he refers. One might at least ask whether this is actually doing justice to him. Just think of the freedom that Kant accords himself in reinterpreting, say, Plato's concept of idea, Aristotle's concept of category, or the rationalist notion of the thing-in-itself: it seems quite clear that none of these appropriations would be approved by experts strictly insisting on the meaning of these concepts in their original context. It therefore seems almost imperative at least to attempt a more conciliatory reading of Mou.⁵⁶

At this point, my own attempt has to remain very modest: what I would like to emphasize is that Mou tells us much more than might be expected from his hermetizing discourse on intellectual intuition and the perfect teaching. In his monograph on the Perfect Good, Mou writes about the freedom of a human being: "Although our existence in terms of our individual lives is something *defined* (*jicheng* 既成), it can still be improved [changed toward the good]. . . . Although all things between heaven and earth are defined existences, they still are not *determined* (*dingxing* 定性) existences."⁵⁷ If we follow Mou and accept that their moral feeling enables humans to become agents of the genuine heart and if we agree that, in this, what they do indeed is to act freely, then we have to admit a way in which the agent of free will, noumenal according to Mou, can guide acts affecting and transforming the natural world. If Mou states that humans are defined, he seems to admit the triviality that as physical beings we are following the laws of nature.

Now, we might argue that our experience in fact also tells us that there are many situations where we are free to decide what we do and what we don't. Our common-sense perspective seems to defy any attempt at declaring this experienced fact as mere illusion. If I decide to drop a book, there are doubtless many physical processes involved—in my brain and my nervous and muscular systems, as well as in the physical body of the book and the surrounding setting. Yet, although it is quite certain that

there is, in my brain, a neural, and hence physical, state contemporaneous with my mental state of deciding to drop the book, people like Putnam have argued, convincingly in my view, that there is no functional relation, let alone an identity, between that physical state and the mental content.

If humans were nothing but natural beings, they would be entirely determined by the laws of nature. Free will would only be a subjective illusion. Of course, as natural beings humans, just like all other natural things, are physical and hence determined by the laws of nature—they are what Mou calls “defined” in the lines above. Yet given the complexity of the entirety of human experience, both Sellars and Putnam have argued that it is simply not conceivable that each and every element in it is reducible to a physical event in the sense of an eliminative naturalism.

For Mou, too, laws of nature imply essentially rational factors—namely their logical or mathematical structures. And even if Mou could be proven wrong on this point, the laws of nature have to be related to everyday experiences and practices in order to play any explanatory role. Even if an explanation is conceived of as eliminative, one has to know what it eliminates in order to recognize it as an explanation. That the scientific picture of the world will at some point entirely replace what Sellars called its manifest picture simply seems improbable, as the scientific picture remains totally opaque if entirely dissociated from the latter. This does not mean that the reality that the natural laws capture depends on our knowledge of it. But it claims that the conception of this reality as laws is not comprehensible, and impossibly understood in terms of eliminative explanation, if it is isolated from its embedding in the highly redundant world of everyday experience.

But let us get back to free will: if it is already erroneous to assume that mental states can either be identified with or functionally related to neurophysical states, how much more difficult would it seem to imagine that such combinations of mental states and actions are in any straightforward way explained in merely physical terms? It seems to me that Mou’s distinction between “defined” and “determined” might indicate a possibility to conceive his self-declared belief in freedom as something more than a simple belief: Mou is convinced and tries to show that even the very possibility of natural science is essentially based on our human condition—for example the human need to think in terms of objects and relations—if one is to think at all. We might therefore try to argue, in Mou’s vein, that just like the idea of freedom, the very idea of explanation, and hence all attempts to eliminate freedom as a legitimate concept of human self-reflection, depends on specifically human preconditions. Although it may be useful for some scientific investigations to try to eliminate mental factors like will, it appears that it is unconceivable as a matter of principle systematically to relate a person’s proneness to understand herself as acting freely to a specific neurophysical state of her brain.

Of course, the preceding lines have only drawn a coarse sketch of what would need to be developed and expounded in much more detail. What I intended to suggest is simply that there is a way of making sense of Mou’s talk of intellectual intuition, a way of lifting its concealing veil and relating it to our everyday experience. It seems possible to address the questions Mou raises without taking to the letter the

apparent impenetrability of his kind of moral metaphysics to any kind of discursive mode of speaking.

If Mou's emphasis on the internal aspect of meaning, on the individual and intuitive accessibility of moral acting, on the irreducibility to a merely descriptive or regimented language of central human experiences can be dissociated from the grandiloquence of his metaphysical musings on the absolute, there not only seems to be a way toward understanding the problems that Mou's moral metaphysics attempts to address, but it might even seem possible to make sense of his "two-tiered ontology": if it is essential to man that any one of us enters life in a way that is irreducibly individual, internal, and only marginally communicable, if the language we speak and that we interpret out of our individual experience as human beings in interaction with other human beings is only in part reducible to the kind of regimented language used in the sciences, to name but two aspects suggested by Mou's thought, it is mistaken, we might infer, to try to reduce ourselves to the picture provided by the systematizing efforts of science.

More generally, we are called to withstand any temptation to reduce ourselves to any picture, any representation, whatsoever. Drawing pictures of themselves is essential to humans. Yet, so is acting, the dimension that is, after all, reflected in these pictures. These two modes of being human, the representing and the acting, are mutually dependent, and reducing man to either is fundamentally mistaken. This is the reason why it would be wrong to endorse fully a scientific picture denying human freedom. It would mean that we mistake what is inevitably one possible picture among others as an ultimate fact about ourselves. If this kind of reductionism leads to denying something to man, as Mou puts it with respect to intellectual intuition, what had always been available to him, it is guilty of severely impeding man's development toward perfection—the declared aim of Mou's doctrine of humaneness. A picture is only meaningful in relation to human activity: every picture furthermore favors certain decisions while disfavoring others.

To do justice to Mou it seems important for me to notice that this does not mean that these pictures are *but* illusions or *but* appearance. Rather, they are warranted by the multiplicity of human activity that they depict. Yet, there are various pictures of the world and of ourselves. We know that one and the same experience is amenable to most divergent representations. That this is possible seems to presuppose an insight into the basis these various pictures draw upon. This seems a plausible way of making sense of what Mou sometimes refers to as a lived experience of acting as opposed to mere representation. It is the former that he tries to capture with his notion of intellectual intuition. If so, its function to me seems to be regulative—it reminds us that any representation refers back to an act—which is not representable itself.

In this view, the contrast between a representing and non-representing ontology might simply refer to the mutual interdependence of the many pictures in which we conceive ourselves and the immediacy of our experience *in actu* of ourselves. The latter is what warrants that we are free to choose some pictures of ourselves and to refuse others. Because there is no picture that is fully adequate with respect to our immediate experience, it is demanded that we do not take the distinctions suggested

by the pictures as the last word. As in different circumstances, these pictures themselves might have been different; they are all merely relative. Our actions are therefore to be directed toward reconciliation rather than exclusion or separation. Yes, it is true that intellectual intuition in this sense is normatively void in that it is unable to tell us what, in a specific situation, we have to do.⁵⁸ However, it seems that it can perfectly well give us a criterion for deciding which out of a certain number of alternative actions has to be chosen—namely the one that has the greatest potential for reconciliation. It can, that is, have a normative function also in evaluating alternative possibilities to act upon. The kind of pre-predicative experience, as we might call it in a phenomenologically inspired vocabulary, that enables one to become aware that one and the same event is amenable to utterly different representations—all equally highlighting certain aspects while blinding out others—in Mou’s view thus seems to be a precondition of our human experience, although we are unable to entirely explicate it in analytical terms.

Whether or not we deem such a thing as a pre-predicative experience possible, whether or not we regard it as relevant to issues of epistemology or ontology, what it allows is to make plausible why Mou thinks of that lived experience as a *transcendental* foundation of knowledge. Although hardly reconcilable with the Kantian notion of transcendental, this use of the term nonetheless becomes traceable. In terming this assumed unrepresentable yet experienceable basis of human knowledge transcendental rather than transcendent, Mou simply takes into account that it does not transcend human experience: it would simply be wrong to call it transcendent. As a fundamental experience it is within the scope of human activity. As something that, at the same time, evades any attempt at fully explicating it in analytical terms, it marks a boundary of objective knowledge. Eventually, such a fundamental experience, although not entirely explicable in discursive language, *is* nonetheless communicable. We can tell others about the most intimate experiences of our lives even if we admit that they are not reducible to propositions. In the metaphorical or paradoxical language of poetry, parables, or allusions, in the various kinds of non-technical, non-regimented modes of language, we are able to share with others that to which we ascribe an existential import to our lives. Or, to speak with Hegel, humans “can talk about what happened to them as the persons they are.”⁵⁹

Notes

- 1 – Also *wu zheng* 無諍; Jason Clower renders the Chinese term as “indisputable” or “without dispute” (Jason Clower, *The Unlikely Buddhologist: Tiantai Buddhism in Mou Zongsan’s New Confucianism* [Leiden: Brill, 2010], p. 242); N. Serina Chan uses “non-contestable” (N. Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan* [Leiden: Brill, 2011], p. 190).
- 2 – A “type of truth” that, as N. Serina Chan puts it, “should regulate daily living in China” (N. Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan*, p. 92).

- 3 – Mou Zongsan, *Yuanshanlun* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1985), p. 334.
- 4 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, pp. 334–335.
- 5 – For the crucial role of Mou’s perfect teaching for establishing his own interpretation of the Confucian Way and his elevation of the “teaching of the heart” see also Olf Lehmann, “Moderner Konfuzianismus zwischen ‘Lehre’ und ‘Argumentation’,” in *Der Konfuzianismus: Ursprünge—Entwicklungen—Perspektiven*, ed. Ralf Moritz et al. (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1998), pp. 196–215, 201–202.
- 6 – Zheng Jiadong argues that it was exactly in this sense of “cultural continuity” that the term *daotong*—adopted from a premodern Confucian context—was conceived by most authors of the Republican period, including Mou’s teacher Xiong Shili. See Zheng Jiadong, *Mou Zongsan* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 2000), p. 161.
- 7 – N. Serina Chan remarks that Mou’s new *daotong* “in sum . . . assert[s] the primacy of the Ru moral and religious tradition in China” (N. Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan*, p. 89).
- 8 – N. Serina Chan notes that “Mou’s moral metaphysics and cultural nationalism are entwined” (N. Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan*, p. 214). In her view, Mou regarded his moral metaphysics as “moving forward” Kant’s moral philosophy, an alleged achievement that “for Mou and some of his disciples . . . represented a splendid triumph of Chinese culture over Western culture and boosted their cultural nationalist pride in the face of the continuing global dominance of Western culture” (N. Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan*, pp. 116–117). I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing to my attention a recent study by Jason Clower showing that it was the conceived struggle of China with the *West*—rather than *India*—that was a decisive factor in determining the philosophical “reference texts” of New Confucians. See his “Chinese Ressentiment and Why New Confucians Stopped Caring About Yogacara,” in John Makeham, ed., *Transforming Consciousness: Yogacara Thought in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 377–411. The most comprehensive study on Mou’s work in the context of modernity still is Olf Lehmann’s *Zur moralmetaphysischen Grundlegung einer konfuzianischen Moderne* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2003).
- 9 – Sébastien Billioud has noticed in Mou’s conception of moral cultivation a certain tension between the idea of a gradual and an instantaneous realization of intellectual intuition. See Sébastien Billioud, *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity: A Study of Mou Zongsan’s Moral Metaphysics* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 216–226.
- 10 – Jason Clower’s *The Unlikely Buddhistologist* is the most extensive investigation of the significance of Tiantai Buddhism for Mou’s work. Hans-Rudolf Kantor’s *Die Heilslehre im Tiantai-Denken des Zhiyi (538–597) und der philosophische*

Begriff des 'Unendlichen' bei Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1999) also contains a comprehensive discussion of Tiantai Buddhism based partly on Mou's respective investigations. The relevance of Tiantai scholastics for Mou's own thought is discussed in the final chapter.

11 – Mou Zongsan, *Foxing yu bore* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1977), p. 7.

12 – Ibid., p. 576.

13 – Ibid., p. 578.

14 – Ibid., p. 583.

15 – Ibid., p. 576.

16 – Ibid., p. 599.

17 – Ibid., p. 638:

On the second level [i.e. of perfect teachings, Suter], there is only one system, and this is precisely the *Lotus-sūtra*'s which discloses from the expedients [of his teachings] and the traces [of his words] the real and original [Buddha], thereby establishing the perfect teaching of the Tiantai. Therefore a multiplicity of systems is only possible on the first order [i.e., of separating teachings, *biejiao* 別教, Suter], because [first order systems] are analytical statements and [thereby] also contestable—anything which is analytically stated is contestable; but in second order [systems], there is only unity but no duality, and for this reason they state in a non-analytical way, basing their instructions on paradoxical 'identity' (*guijue de 'ji'* 詭譎的「即」). Thus, among the *sūtras* of this second order one is empty (*xu* 虛), one is substantial [real] (*shi* 實). The empty one is the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, the substantial one the *Lotus-sūtra*. Both are uncontestable, as both instruct on the basis of paradoxical 'identity'.

On Mou's use of *biejiao* see Clower, *The Unlikely Buddhistologist*, pp. 103–104.

18 – Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 598.

19 – Ibid., p. 599.

20 – Ibid., p. 602.

21 – Mou puts this in the following way:

As the Buddha has introduced discursive explanations (*fenbie shuo* 分別說), there needs to be a different method of instruction allowing him to turn the obstructions within this differentiating speech into a universal teaching (*tonghua* 通化). This method allows one to recognize that in spite of the instrumental role of differentiating speech, all and everything in its entirety is but one so that all distinctions are swept away by the disappearance of any differentiating characteristics whatsoever, that consequently, one is allowed neither to give in to fixation nor to submit to obstruction, that there is nothing either to be chosen or to be refuted. This "different way" is the dharma-gate of non-contending wisdom (*wuzheng bore* 無諍般若). (Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 1205)

22 – On the reason for the "non-contending" character of Buddha's speech Mou writes:

If the Buddha says something specific, and if he does so in this specific manner, then basically this is only a salvific instrument (*upāya*), speech as didactic means. If one recognizes that it is speech as a means, that it is not necessary at all, then, too, it is not necessary to raise any objection, and in this, the fixating mind transforms into a detached mind. . . . By [this] transformation the detached mind is disclosed, and this necessarily brings about a non-contending wisdom that is apt to erase both all conceptual elaborations (*xilun* 戲論) and all dharmic hindrances and transgressions, so that one reaches true liberation. (Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 1205)

23 – Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 1205.

24 – Ibid., p. 1210.

25 – To exemplify this Mou states that the doctrines of the “storehouse-consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*) and of the “womb of Buddhahood” (*tathāgagarbha*) are only “arbitrarily advanced alternative possibilities” for providing an explanatory rationale for Buddhist salvific practice (Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 1213).

26 – Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 1205.

27 – Ibid., p. 1213.

28 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, p. 305.

29 – Ibid.

30 – Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 1023. At the end of this short remark, Mou refers the reader to the notion of an “inclusive” perfect teaching discussed in his *Xianxiang yu wuzhishen*, concluding that “this said, they [i.e., the Buddhist and Confucian perfect teachings] have to be one and the same (*tongtong yiru* 同同一如), even if their approaches are not the same” (ibid.). For the notion of an “inclusive perfect teaching” see below.

31 – Mou, *Foxing yu bore*, p. 1023.

32 – Ibid., p. 830.

33 – Ibid.

34 – See *Chuanxilu* III, no. 315, in Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *Wang Yangming: Instructions for Practical Living* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 243–245.

35 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, p. 317.

36 – Ibid., p. 318.

37 – Ibid.

38 – Mou Zongsan, *Xianxiang yu wuzhishen* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1990), p. 454.

39 – Ibid.

40 – Ibid.

41 – Ibid., p. 455.

- 42 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, p. ii.
- 43 – Mou Zongsan, *Zhengdao yu zhidao* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1991), p. 4.
- 44 – Mou, *Xianxiang yu wuzhishen*, p. xvii.
- 45 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, p. xi. To my knowledge the most detailed attempt at reconstructing Mou's argument entwining the Kantian notion of the "Highest Good" (*summum bonum*) and his Confucian variant of a perfect teaching is undertaken by Lehmann, *Zur moralmetaphysischen Grundlegung einer konfuzianischen Moderne*, pp. 109–135. In many respects, the present article draws on Lehmann's much more detailed work. The reader will notice, however, that I do not share Lehmann's view that, in trying to understand Mou's references to Kantianism, we have to base ourselves on "as conventional, 'non-creative' (*nicht-kreativ*), and 'faithful' (*artig*) an interpretation of the notion of transcendentalism as possible." See Lehmann, *Zur moralmetaphysischen Grundlegung einer konfuzianischen Moderne*, p. 34 n. 54.
- 46 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, p. 334.
- 47 – Stephan Schmidt bases himself on Mou's identification of a prioricity and in-nateness for arguing that this implies, from a Kantian perspective, the heteronomous character of Mou's so-called moral autonomy. See his "Mou Zongsan, Hegel, and Kant: The Quest for Confucian Modernity," *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 2 (2011): 260–302, 266.
- 48 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, p. 332.
- 49 – Julia Ching, "Confucian Way (Tao) and Tao-T'ung," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 3 (1974): 371–388, 379.
- 50 – Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1948), pp. 67–181, 172.
- 51 – Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," p. 173.
- 52 – "If a religion attaches an eternal significance to something transient and if reason fixes its eye on the transient element alone and cries out about superstition, then reason is to blame for setting to work superficially and overlooking the eternal element" (Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," p. 177).
- 53 – Joël Thoraval presents the case of Schelling's "positive use" of the concept of intellectual intuition (Joël Thoraval, "La question de l'intuition intellectuelle et la philosophie confucéenne contemporaine," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 232 [2005], pp. 231–245, 237–240). He discusses the similarity of Schelling's and Mou's references to this Kantian notion (Thoraval, "La question de l'intuition intellectuelle et la philosophie confucéenne contemporaine," p. 241). Also Schmidt and Billioud notice that Mou Zongsan widely ignores the discussion of intellectual intuition by German idealists (Schmidt, "Mou Zongsan,

Hegel, and Kant: The Quest for Confucian Modernity," pp. 263, 279; Billioud, *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity*, pp. 83–89—but see also p. 87). Like Thoraval, Schmidt suggests that one possible reason might be the crucial role of the positive interpretation of "intellectual intuition" for distinguishing the two continents of Western and Chinese philosophy (Thoraval, "La question de l'intuition intellectuelle et la philosophie confucéenne contemporaine," p. 241; Schmidt, "Mou Zongsan, Hegel, and Kant: The Quest for Confucian Modernity," p. 279).

54 – Zheng, *Mou Zongsan*, pp. 166–167.

55 – Ibid., p. 197.

56 – Many have tried this: Stephan Schmidt and Sébastien Billioud have related Mou's moral metaphysics to the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas. See, e.g., Billioud, *Thinking Through Confucian Modernity*, pp. 23, 155–160; Stephan Schmidt; "Moralsubjekt und Erkenntnissubjekt: Zu einer kategorialen Unterscheidung im Denken des modernen Konfuzianismus," *Polylog: Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren* 19 (2008): 61–82, 78–82. Joël Thoraval has attempted to compare New Confucian intellectual discourse with Lacanian psychoanalysis rather than with academic philosophy. See Joël Thoraval, "Sur la transformation de la pensée néo-confucéenne en discours philosophique moderne: Réflexions sur quelques apories du néo-confucianisme contemporain," *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 27 (2005): 91–119.

57 – Mou, *Yuanshanlun*, p. 306.

58 – This is the conclusion of a convincingly argued and instructive article by Weimin Shi and Lin Chiulo:

As an act-deontology, Mou's philosophy does not bring up any normative principle. And affectedly crossing-over, which is the way that Mou proposes for determining what ought to be done in a given situation, proves futile. This seems to indicate that Mou's philosophy is normatively empty. Grounding morality on a metaphysical substance does not yield any content normatively relevant for determining right and wrong.

See Weimin Shi and Chiulo Lin, "Confucian Moral Experience and Its Moral Foundation: From the Point of View of Mou Zongsan," *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 2 (2015): 542–566, 556.

59 – Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," p. 181.